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RUEHWN/AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN 5578  
RUEHGE/AMEMBASSY GEORGETOWN 3642  
RUEHKG/AMEMBASSY KINGSTON 8510  
RUEHPU/AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE 3519  
RUEHSP/AMEMBASSY PORT OF SPAIN 4680  
RUEHDG/AMEMBASSY SANTO DOMINGO 2799  
RUEHUB/USINT HAVANA 0422

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STATE FOR WHA/CAR RCBUDDEN, INR/B

E.O. 12958: DNG: CO 04/18/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KCOR](#) [CH](#) [BF](#)

SUBJECT: EMBATTLED FOREIGN MINISTER ACCUSED OF CHINESE VISA  
FRAUD

REF: NASSAU 435

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires D. Brent Hardt for reasons 1.4(b) and  
(d)

11. (S) SUMMARY: Bahamian Consular Affairs Chief Dorothea Lafleur in a private lunch with Embassy's Consular Chief accused Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell of complicity in pressuring consular officers to issue visas to patently ineligible applicants. She further alleged that Mitchell was involved in a fraudulent visa scam to bring into a large group of Chinese nationals. According to the Lafleur, Mitchell attempted to pressure consular officers to issue the visas and, when unsuccessful, attempted to bypass Bahamian consular law and division leadership. In response, staff walked out on strike, forcing Mitchell to back down. Lafleur said Mitchell was likely receiving financial kickbacks for the visas that were issued, though she said she had no hard proof of this. She also said that Mitchell will not return to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs even if he and his party win reelection, noting that he has already completely cleaned out his office. Whether or not the allegations are true, Mitchell does face a tough battle for reelection, and there may be a new Foreign Minister in May. END SUMMARY.

12. (S) Consular Chief met with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Senior Assistant Secretary for Consular Affairs Dorothea Lafleur on April 12 at Lafleur's invitation. During the lunch meeting, Lafleur accused Foreign Minister Fred Mitchell of complicity in visa fraud by pressuring his staff to issue visas to ineligible visa applicants and, specifically, to unqualified Chinese nationals. According to Lafleur, Mitchell directly ordered her to issue visas to thirty Chinese nationals whose applications were sponsored by a Member of Parliament, Sidney Stubbs. (NOTE: Sidney Stubbs is a notorious local politician often accused of corruption. END NOTE.) Lafleur forwarded the applications to her visa security staffer Sands to investigate the suspicious looking cases, who subsequently deemed them fraudulent. Lafleur then refused to issue the visas.

13. (S) When Mitchell insisted Lafleur issue the visas, she requested more information on the Chinese applicants. She was informed by Mitchell and Stubbs that they all were high-level managers at large, multinational Chinese companies in China and were coming to the Bahamas at the invitation of Stubbs for business related travel. Lafleur sent the documents to the Chinese Embassy in Nassau to ascertain

whether the companies listed were legitimate. The Chinese Embassy in Nassau, after a week-long review, stated that they had no record of any of the companies listed by the Minister, with the exception of one company which they characterized as a small "mom and pop operation" in China. Lafleur again refused to issue the visas.

¶4. (S) Lafleur claims that as a result of her refusals, Mitchell appointed another official above her in the Consular Affairs Office, who would have the authority to issue over Lafleur's denials. This unlawful appointment provoked the entire consular division to go on strike. (Comment: the strike was widely reported in the news, but it was attributed to administrative issues in the consular division.) Mitchell was forced to remove his appointee from the oversight position to end the strike. He then tried to get the Chinese visas approved by assigning issuing power to the Bahamian Embassy in Beijing, staffed by an Ambassador. That idea was squashed when the Permanent Secretary asked Consular Affairs about idea, and was told that the Ambassador had no consular training and that the UK Embassy in Beijing was more qualified by virtue of language and cultural familiarity to issue visas on behalf of The Bahamas. LaFleur also stated that Mitchell had sent another Bahamian to China to promote travel (and visas) to the Bahamas, but that person lacked diplomatic status there and had been removed from the country as a visa overstay.

¶5. (S) Asked why Mitchell would be personally interested in facilitating fraudulent visa issuance to Chinese nationals, Lafleur alleged that Mitchell received a portion of whatever fee the Chinese nationals paid for the visa. While lacking hard proof, Lafleur cited the lack of support for the visas from the Chinese Embassy and the involvement of the notorious

Sidney Stubbs. Lafleur also expressed relief that Mitchell would not be returning as Foreign Minister. Citing internal sources, and noting that Mitchell had already completely cleaned out his office at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (reftel), Lafleur said that regardless of which party wins the election, Minister Mitchell would not be returning. LaFleur noted that she favored the governing PLP in the upcoming election, as long as the PLP does not reappoint Mitchell as Foreign Minister.

¶6. (S) COMMENT: Lafleur's bribery allegation adds credence to allegations that have long been circulating in The Bahamas regarding Minister Mitchell, and which are being used by the opposition to discredit Mitchell, who faces a tight race against a formidable opposition candidate for his parliamentary seat (reftel). The allegation also fits with a number of events that took place and suspicions that have been suggested by MFA contacts. For example, a staff walkout did take place within recent months that was poorly understood and explained in the media. Newspaper reports have, however, hit around the edges of this scandal, and Mitchell is squarely in the cross hairs of the Free National Movement and its anti-corruption "It is About Trust" election theme. In fact, FNM leader Ingraham has privately pledged to devote whatever resources it takes to defeat Mitchell. The fact that Mitchell now also appears to be a target of his own senior staff -- even staff that supports his party's re-election -- adds more credibility to the view that Mitchell may not keep his Foreign Affairs portfolio even if he and the PLP are able to win re-election.

HARDT